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The Improbable and the Impossible in Himmler's Posen Speech

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German Text from Himmler's Speech:

Ich will auch ... Ein ganz schweres Kapitel will ich hier vor Ihnen in aller Offenheit nennen. Es soll zwischen uns ausgesprochen sein, und trotzdem werden wir nicht in der Oeffentlichkeit nie darueber reden, genau so wenig, wie wir am 30. Juni gezoegert haben, die befohlene Pflicht zu tun und Kameraden, die sich verfehlt hatten, an die Wand zu stellen und zu erschiessen, wie wir darueber niemals gesprochen haben and sprechen werden.

Das war so eine Gottseidank in uns wohnende Takt, Selbsverstaendlichkeit des Taktes, dass wir uns untereinander nie darueber unterhalten haben, nie darueber sprachen. Es hat jeden geschauert, und jeder war sich klar, dass er es das naechste Mal wieder tun wuerde, wenn es befohlen wird und wenn es notwendig ist.

Ich meine die Judenevakuierung, die Ausrottong des juedischen Volkes. Es gehoert zu den Dingen, die man leicht ausspricht. "Das juedische Volk wird ausgerottet," sagt Ihnen jeder Parteigenosse, "Ganz klar steht in unserem Programm drin, Ausschaltung der Juden, Ausrottung machen wir. Pfah! Kleinigkeit!"

Und dann kommen sie alle, alle die braven 80 Millionen Deutschen, und jeder hat seinen anstaendigen Juden, sagt: all anderen sind Schweine, und hier ist ein prima Jude.

Und zugesehen, es durchgestanden hat keiner. Von Euch werden die meisten wissen, was es heisst, wenn 100 Leichen beisammen liegen, wenn 500 daliegen, oder wenn 1000 daliegen. Und dies durchgehalten zu haben, und dabei — abgesehen von menschlichen Ausnameschwaechen — anstaendig geblieben zu sein, hat uns hart gemacht, und ist ein niemals genanntes und niemals zu nennendes Ruhmesblatt.

Denn wir wissen, wie schwer wir uns taeten, wenn wir heute noch in jeder Stadt bei den Bombenangriffen, bei den Lasten des Krieges und bei den Entbehrungen, wenn wir da noch die Juden als geheime Saboteure, Agitatoren, und Hetzer haetten. Wir wuerden wahrscheinlich in das Stadium des Jahres 16-17 jetzt gekommen sein, wenn die Juden noch im deutschen Volkskoerper saessen.

Und die Reichtuemer, die sie hatten, haben wir ihnen abgenommen, und ich habe einen strikten Befehl gegeben, den Obergruppenfuehrer Pohl durchgefuehrt hat. Wir haben diese Reichtuemer restlos dem Reich, dem Staat abgefuehrt. Wir haben uns nichts davon genommen.

Einzelne, die sich verfehlt haben, die werden gemaess einem von mir gegebenen Befehl, den ich am Anfang gab. Wer sich auch nur eine Mark davon nimmt, ist des Todes. Eine Anzahl SS-Maenner haben sich dagegen verfehlt. Es sind nicht sehr viele, und sie werden des Todes sein. Gnadenlos! Wir haben das moralische Recht, wir hatten die Plicht unserem Volk gegenueber das zu tun, dieses Volk, das uns umbringen wollte, umzubringen. Wir haben aber nicht das Recht, uns auch nur mit einem Pelz, mit einer Mark, mit einer Zigarette, mit einer Uhr, mit sonst etwas zu bereichern. Das haben wir nicht.

Denn wir wollen nicht am Schluss, weil wir den Bazillus ausrotten, an dem Bazillus krank werden und sterben. Da werde ich niemals zusehen, dass so etwas ueberhaupt nur auch eine kleine Faeulnisstelle bei uns eintritt oder sich festsetzt. Sondern, wo sich eine festsetzen sollte, werden wir sie gemeinsam ausbrennen.

Insgesamt aber koennen wir sagen: Wir haben diese schwerste Aufgabe in Liebe zu unserem Volk getan, und wir haben keinen Schaden in unserem Innern, in unserer Seele, in unserem Charakter daran genommen.

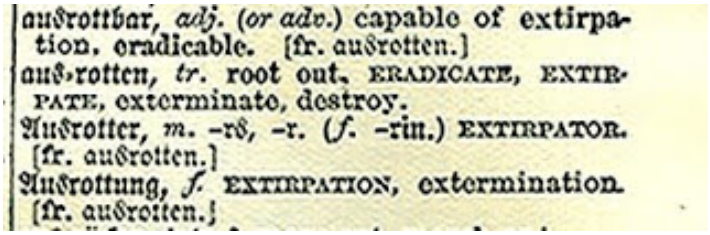
Introduction

I first heard the recording of the *Ausrottung* passage from Himmler's Posen speech of 4 October 1943 when it was played in a *60 Minutes* segment featuring Mike Wallace and Ernst Zundel, in 1994. This was supposedly slam-dunk evidence that Zundel was wrong and that the Holocaust was historical fact.
Thematically the passage is quite confusing, with two main themes intermingled. One is that SS-men must remain free from corruption, and that a few SS-men who have been caught in corruption (whether stealing or accepting bribes is not specified) while rounding up Jews for deportation will be shot. The passage begins and ends with that theme. The other theme (1:48-2:23; 3:11-3:41; 4:36-4:45) seems to be that the removal of the Jews is both politically necessary and morally deserved, and must be done in spite of sentimentality.

The validity of the speech as evidence for mass-murder of the Jews hinges on the meaning of the word *Ausrottung*, and, apart from that, on a single sentence that seems strange in its context.

The Meaning of *Ausrotten* and *Ausrottung*

Defenders of the Holocaust Myth insist that the German words *Ausrottung* and *ausrotten*, when used in reference to people, can only mean killing, a point which they will demonstrate by adducing some German dictionary published after the war. These Defenders of the Faith furthermore insist that the meaning has not changed. Both claims are easily disproven, through consultation of old dictionaries and through consideration of usage prior to 1945.


außrottbar, *adj.* (*or adv.*) capable of extirpation, eradicable. [fr. außrotten.]
auß-rotten, *tr.* root out, ERADICATE, EXTIRPATE, exterminate, destroy.
Außrotter, *m.* -rß, -r. (*f.* -rin.) EXTIRPATOR. [fr. außrotten.]
Außrottung, *f.* EXTIRPATION, extermination. [fr. außrotten.]

This is from *A New Compendious German and English Dictionary* by William Dwight Whitney, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1887. (That is only two years before Hitler was born, and 13 years before Himmler.) *Ausrotten* and the noun derived from it, *Ausrottung*, historically have a range of meanings. The literal meaning of *ausrotten* is also its primary meaning, "root out." "Eradicate" is simply a Latin-derived word that also quite literally means "root out." "Extirpate" likewise is defined as "to pull up by the roots." "Exterminate" had a meaning in 19th and early 20th century dictionaries that is no longer used: its primary meaning is to place outside (*ex*) the border (*terminus*); therefore "exterminate" in older usage need not mean killing. "Destroy" according to this German-English dictionary was a possible definition of *ausrotten* but not the most likely.

The Luther Bible has only one instance of the noun *Ausrottung*, but copious instances of the verb *ausrotten*. When one compares corresponding passages in the Luther Bible and English Bibles, one finds that where Luther used forms of *ausrotten* the English expression typically used is "cut off," which means something

like cast out or expel. Here are a couple of examples from the Luther Bible with English translation.

> Wenn aber ein Männlicher nicht beschnitten wird an seiner Vorhaut, wird er ausgerottet werden aus seinem Volk, weil er meinen Bund gebrochen hat. **[*Das Erste Buch Mose (Genesis) 17:14, Luther Bible*]**

> But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant. **[*Genesis*17:14, *New American Standard Bible*]**

> Darum haltet meinen Sabbat, denn er soll euch heilig sein. Wer ihn entheiligt, der soll des Todes sterben. Denn wer eine Arbeit am Sabbat tut, der soll ausgerottet werden aus seinem Volk. **[*Das Zweite Buch Mose* (*Exodus*) 31.14, Luther Bible]**

> Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. **[Exodus 31:14, *New American Standard Bible*]**

For use of the noun *Ausrottung* that was contemporary and part of Himmler's milieu*, one can refer to *Mein Kampf*. That book contains a number of instances in which *Ausrottung* obviously does not mean killing, like this:

> ***Mein Kampf*, 1944 edition:** Was aber besaß dieses Bündnis für einen Wert, wenn erst das Deutschtum der Habsburgmonarchie ausgerottet worden wäre? **(p. 142)**

> **Ralph Mannheim's translation:** But what value did this alliance have, once Germanism had been exterminated in the Habsburg monarchy? **(p. 129)**

> **My translation:** What kind of value did this alliance possess once the German population of the Habsburg Monarchy had been eliminated?

While *ausrotten* in the Luther Bible generally means to expel, Hitler's use of the noun *Ausrottung* in several instances from *Mein Kampf* clearly means something like dissolution. He was talking about the assimilation of Austria's ethnic German population as Czechs; there is no indication that the word *ausgerottet* is supposed to mean that the Habsburg Monarchy intended to kill its ethnic Germans. The important point is that *ausrotten* and *Ausrottung* do not necessarily mean killing.

Ausrotten and *Ausrottung* in Context

This speech has the words *Evakuierung* (evacuation) and *Ausrottung* juxtaposed as synonyms.

> ***"Ich meine die Judenevakuierung, die Ausrottung des jüdischen Volkes."***

Since both words refer to the same event, the assumption that *Ausrottung* here must mean killing creates a contradiction. The contradiction could be resolved by supposing that *Judenevakuierung* (evacuation of the Jews) here is a euphemism, but there is no reason to make that leap of interpretation, given that *Ausrottung* does not have to mean killing.
A closer examination of the text makes it impossible that killing is what is meant, since Himmler says that *every party member knows* that *Ausrottung* of the Jews is being done, and that it is *in unserem Programm*, obviously meaning the party-program of the NSDAP. To construe *Ausrottung* as mass-murder in this speech is to understand Himmler as saying not only that every party member knew that the Jews were to be killed, but that the intention had been declared by the NSDAP already in February 1920 when the *Parteiprogramm der NSDAP* was published. *Ausrottung* does not have to mean killing, and in this speech it clearly does not. The NSDAP's program only says about Jews (point 4) that they are not members of the German nation and may not be German citizens, and consequently (point 5) reside in Germany only as guests and are subject to legislation about foreigners. Therefore a proper translation for *Ausrottung* here would be exclusion or expulsion.

Caveat

(27 February 2011)

What I have presented thus far is an adequate debunking of the interpretation of the *Ausrottung*-passage that makes it into evidence for the Holocaust. There is no way that *Ausrottung* in that speech can mean killing, and the purport of the speech in regard to the fate of the Jews really hinges on that.

In the last two sections however I nonetheless broach the question of the authenticity of the recording. I do this for three reasons. First, because in my examinations of other pieces of war-propaganda I have found several examples of multi-layered frauds; for example, there is the fraudulent *Conversations with Hitler* by Hermann Rauschning, which was used as mere raw material for the U.S. Army's screenwriters to alter and create even more sinister quotes. Second, I find that the speech seems very disjointed in spots, and the possibility that this could be due to tampering provides an explanation. Third, because although there is a typed transcript of this speech supposedly approved by Himmler, which was exhibited at Nuremberg, there is some possibility that the typed transcript could be a fraud, since there have been other Nuremberg documents that according to Dr. Robert Faurisson seem to be suspect, *e.g.* the *Wannsee Protocol,* which does not conform to the usual characteristics of an official document of the Third Reich at all.

Rather than err on the side of caution I decided to write my thoughts, based on the possibly inadequate information that I had. When I become a bit more convinced that the transcript is authentic I may eventually remove the last two sections of this article, but fear not, because everything above this *caveat* is really all that you need.

A Suspiciously Awkward Transition

We are told that what we hear is unedited, but I am not so sure; some of the transitions in this fragment of a speech are extremely awkward.

I found this to be the most awkward transition. Any SS-man who steals for himself will be executed. "Gnadenlos!" — "Without mercy!" Himmler screams. He then says, "We have the moral right, we had the duty to our people to do it," clearly referring to the need to execute SS-men who behave corruptly, which he had just

been discussing, but then he adds unexpectedly, "to kill this (group of) people who would kill us." It seems to be a mid-sentence change of topic.**

> ***"Wir haben das moralische Recht, wir hatten die Pflicht unserem Volk gegenüber das zu tun, dieses Volk, das uns umbringen wollte, umzubringen."*** **(4:36-4:45)**

The unwarranted change of tense in that sentence is also a problem. He seems to be talking about two different matters when he says, "We have the moral right…." (present tense) and "We had the duty…." (past tense). The use of the past tense there makes no sense, even in terms of the conventional understanding of the speech, since in this context Himmler is talking about a planned future action toward the Jews, or an ongoing action, but not a past action.

Accepting this recording as unedited, one must suppose that Himmler was such a rambling and incoherent speaker that he forgot what he was saying in mid-sentence and could not keep his verb-tenses consistent, and also used the past tense to refer to a future action.

A More Reasonable Explanation

I think that the recording was probably altered as follows. Himmler said, "We had the duty to our people to do it," in one context (probably about a past execution of corrupt SS-men, or the Night of the Long Knives), and in a different context, "We have the moral right to kill this (group of) people who would kill us," implying that the Jews were getting off easy by merely being deprived of wealth and deported. The former statement thus would have been inserted into the latter to change its significance, making it about a deed actually (already!) committed instead of an observation about how restrained and generous the treatment of the Jews was going to be.

It was completely feasible to edit sound recordings after Germany was defeated in 1945, since magnetic recording tape, which unlike wire recording or phonograph record is easily cut and spliced, had already been invented (by a German) in 1928. According to the U.S. National Archives (cited by The Holocaust History Project) the most common method of recording speeches in the Third Reich was direct recording to phonograph disc. Echos in this recording however indicate that the

speech was stored for years on tape.* Unless there is also an original disc-recording that has the same content as the tape, it means that the recording could have been edited.**

Editing a sound-recording to make it seem more incriminating would not be the most outrageous thing that the Allies did in their propaganda during and after the war. (*Cf.* the U.S. Army's *Why We Fight* series, featuring undeniably fake Hitler quotes that could have been exposed by anybody who bothered to check, and deliberately misrepresented documentary footage from China.)

It makes perfect sense to suppose that some similar shenanigans were committed in this case, because the content of Himmler's Posen speech of 4 October 1943, as it has been presented to us in this recording, makes no sense, even in relation to itself.

*** I became aware in October 2009, six months after posting the original version of this essay, that part of my argument, about the shifting meaning of *ausrotten* and *Ausrottung*, had already been formulated by David Irving during his 1997 libel suit against Deborah Lipstadt, and it can be read here.**

**** Recently (August 2013) I have found that *das Volk*, which usually refers to a people in the sense of a nation or an ethnic group, is sometimes used (at least in pre-1945 German) to mean some group of people without regard for ethnicity *etc.* This means that the infinitive-clause, *"dieses Volk, das uns umbringen wollte, umzubringen"* ("to kill this group of people who wanted to kill us"), does not necessarily refer to an entire nationality or ethnicity.**

***** The Holocaust History Project says: "There is a faint before-and-after echo that can be heard at loud portions of the speech, most notably when Himmler shouts "gnadenlos" ("mercilessly"). This is from the magnetic impressions bleeding through two or three layers of tape on a reel, and indicates that a source for our recording spent some years on tape. Whether that is Himmler's original tape or the National Archives' master tape made in the 1970s is, at this time, unknown." The same writer also admits that it is unknown whether the original medium was magnetic tape or phonograph disc, which means that he cannot say that he has examined the recording in its original medium. That should be very troubling given the fact that the trustworthiness of the recording is in question.**

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